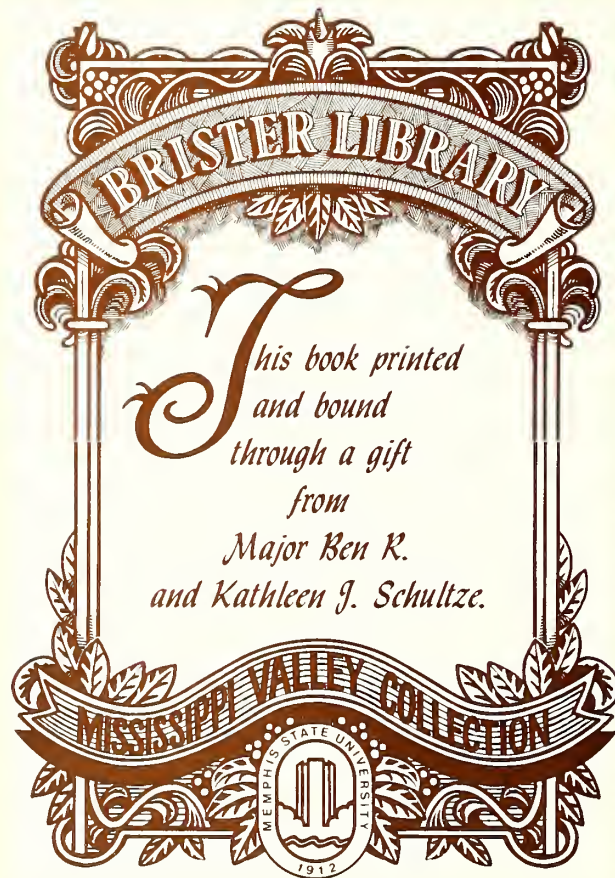


LIFE OF CLARENCE SAUNDERS
INTERVIEW WITH
CLARK PORTEOUS

BY - MICHAEL FREEMAN
ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE
MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY



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INTERVIEW WITH CLARK PORTEOUS

AUGUST 12, 1985

BY

MICHAEL FREEMAN

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PLACE 1669 Forrest

DATE 8/12/85

Clark Brister

(INTERVIEWEE)

Mike Freeman

(For the Mississippi Valley Archives
of the John Willard Brister Library
of Memphis State University)



THIS IS A MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY
RESEARCH OFFICE PROJECT: "THE LIFE OF CLARENCE SAUNDERS," THE
DATE IS AUGUST 12, 1985. THE INTERVIEW IS WITH CLARK PORTEOUS,
FORMER REPORTER OF THE MEMPHIS PRESS-SCIMITAR, THE EVENING NEWS-
PAPER CLOSED IN 1983. THE INTERVIEW IS AT HIS HOME, 1669 FORREST.
MY NAME IS MIKE FREEMAN.

Mr. Freeman: Well, how well did you know Clarence Saunders?

Mr. Porteous: Well, I am afraid I will be sort of a disappointment
to you. It wasn't that well. Of course, I knew of him, knew who
he was. The first thing I remember about him, I guess it was in
the early '30s, I was at Southwestern, and we went to a football
game at old Hodges Field--that was on Jefferson. He had a football
team called the Memphis Tigers. They were playing the Chicago Bears.
They kicked off . . . there was some commotion, and, all of a sudden,
they started again and kicked off again. We didn't know what it was
all about until we saw it in the paper the next day. He (Mr.
Saunders) was late getting there--to the game. He wanted to see the
kickoff, and he demanded to see the kickoff. They didn't want to
kick off again, but he said, "I own the team, and I want to see the
kickoff." He was that sort of fellow. (laughs)

Mr. Freeman: I've heard that story.



Mr. Porteous: I remember Frosty Peters was a big football player. These players used to dropkick. Before the game he would stand on the 50-yard line, dropkick the ball across one goal then turn around and dropkick it across another. Of course, the goals in those days were on the goal line, not back (in the end zone) like they are now.

The Press-Scimitar. I went to work for the Press-Scimitar in 1934, the day after I got out of Southwestern, so this must have been '36, '37. We moved out to the old Commercial Appeal building (495 Union) in '39, so I know this must have been before that. George McCormack sent me out to Jefferson Street. Clarence Saunders was gonna open up a new store. He had lost the Piggly Wiggly business and the Sole Owner (stores). But he had another, and he called it Keedoozle, Kee-doo-zle or Kee-does-all. K-e-e-d-o-o-z-l-e. McCormack wanted me to do a New Yorker type story in about an hour. Anyway . . . Saunders was very affable, showing me how it worked. He had a little key that looked like the holster of a pistol. You put it (the pistol) into a little inlet. If you wanted two cans of pork and beans you pulled the trigger twice, and it flipped into a kind of . . .

Mr. Freeman: Conveyor belt?

Mr. Porteous: A moving belt, yes. And, supposedly, all of the purchases would meet you back at the cash (register) stand. Inside the handle of this gadget was a little tape that would have each item and the prices.



He never could get it (Keedoozle) to work right. He tried over and over again. There were quite a few bugs in it. He finally opened up, and I recall it went pretty well in Sweden. It never did too well here. He had visions of becoming a multi-millionaire again and really going with it (Keedoozle). Later, he opened at Union Extended, He fooled around with it awhile. Frankly, I think he never got over . . . I think he was ahead of his time, as he usually was, and he never really did get it perfected.

The story was, you know, that Clarence Saunders tried to corner the market (of Piggly Wiggly stock) on Wall Street, and they changed the rules on him or he would have. And he, supposedly went broke, and he was building the Pink Palace. When I first came here it was uncompleted. It was a long time before the City took it over and completed it. He had plans for a golf course out there, all those lakes. It was going to be quite a thing. The City took it over before he completed it.

He was supposed to be broke. But I don't buy that. I think he had some money stashed away in a lock box. The whole time I knew him, from the early '30s to his death, he played golf at the Memphis Country Club.

Mr. Freeman: Was he a member?

Mr. Porteous: A man who is broke, bankrupt can't afford to play golf at the Memphis Country Club even in those pre-World War II days when a dollar was worth a lot more, and things were less expensive. Also, you made a lot less money in those days.



I say he was a fine gentleman, and he tried his best to explain to me his intricate system (of Keedoozle) to me. I think I understood it at the time. But it just never could quite work.

Mr. Freeman: Did you watch the machine work?

Mr. Porteous: Oh yea. And he took me back behind it. It was sort of advanced electronics, I guess. He was well ahead of his time.

I remember growing up in Laurel Mississippi. There were all these, more or less, family-owned stores, country stores . . . People would charge (at stores), and they would deliver. Boy, when he came to town with Piggly Wiggly, he just changed it all. He was underselling everybody. I think his system of groceries, first, the Piggly Wigglies came along, then the Jitney Jungles (not a Saunders business), then he had a system called the Clarence Saunders' Stores. They put the old-fashioned family groceries out of business almost completely. You hardly ever see one anymore. There was one between . . . on Monroe and Willett. It is still there, but it is not a grocery anymore. And there was one over here on Tucker. The building is still there. It reached out over the sidewalk. It's not a grocery anymore. What the big Piggly Wiggly type supermarkets didn't put out of business, I think the 7-Elevens have.

Mr. Freeman: The 7-Elevens are the same prototype, the same design as . . . (the Piggly Wiggly).

Mr. Porteous: They are the same as (the old-fashioned store), but they keep open later and are chain, better organized . . .



Clarence Saunders was really something around here. He was kind of an ornry guy. He had to have his own way. Now, he had a couple of sons, one of whom got into trouble quite often. Saunders was quoted at the paper one time, "anything he can do, I can pay his way out of." That was . . . one was named Lee. Lee worked for the City Hospital for a long time. I knew him, he was a quiet sort of guy who did his work. He had a middle-management job, an executive, but not top executive, at City Hospital which was called John Gaston at the time. Clay was the other boy.

Mr. Freeman: Clarence Saunders, Jr. They called him Clay Saunders.

Mr. Porteous: They called him Clay, he may have been Junior. He was always getting into trouble. If it wasn't drunk driving, it was . . . nothing serious, but it just looked like he was always in the news--in trouble some place. One brother never was . . . and the other boy always Clarence Saunders had a nephew, a grandson not long after--he's still around here--he shot Vance Alexander, Jr. in the butt over here in Hein Park. I remember that story.

Mr. Freeman: (laughs) I've heard that story.

Mr. Porteous: I think it was one of those matinee drinking parties or what have you, with married women . . . I don't know. It was kind of a scandalous thing at the time. Vance's old man, at the time, was president of Union Planters Bank. His (Alexander, Senior) son never amounted to much. I can't think of that kid's name--Tunkie Saunders. (Actually, a stepson of Clarence Saunders.) Tunkie was the one who shot Alexander in the butt. (laughs) It wasn't serious, but it made a lot of gossip around here.



Mr. Freeman: Was Clarence Saunders, Senior a party person, was he one to drink?

Mr. Porteous: No, I never knew him to do anything like that. His great passion was golf. He played golf all the time, he loved to play golf. Presumably, he was a fairly good golfer. Someone like George Treadwell, a veteran of the (Memphis) country club out there all these years, could tell you better than I. Always understood he was a good golfer. He played enough, he should have been.

I'm afraid I won't be much help to you. Ask me some questions if you like. You know it's been a long time and I don't remember much. I know. Let me ask my wife. She'd know.
(Pause while he leaves the room.)

Before she married, my wife was Elizabeth Carling. She was a reporter on the Commercial Appeal. She lived at 1575 Vinton. Of course, I used to go over there while we were courting and sit in the big swing on the front porch. There were some noisy parties and stuff. It's not Clarence Saunders who lived next door; it was Clay Saunders' girl friend, the woman he was dating at the time. Every now and then you'd have a lot of commotion. Far as I know, Clarence never went over there.

He lived in . . . some of his houses, ex-homes were quite . . . Bill Terry (baseball star) lived in one of them. He (Saunders) never lived in the Pink Palace. It never was quite completed when he had control of it (Piggly Wiggly). One of his houses had, I believe . . . Holiday Inns just bought on Cherry Road? Another of his houses was further out, the one Bill Terry had owned.



Mr. Freeman: That home is now the Lichterman Nature Center.

Mr. Porteous: The Lichterman Nature Center was one of Saunders' homes. I'm not positive about the house Holiday Inns recently had bought. That was the old Jimmy Butler house. At one time, it was the highest assessed home in Memphis--property assessed. It's a real mansion. There are some other houses Saunders owned. I know the Chi Omega Sorority when I was at Southwestern, their house was a log cabin. It's not there now. I feel reasonably sure--after all that's been fifty years ago--it came off from one of Clarence Saunders' places and moved to the Southwestern campus. It was a right interesting log cabin at that time.

Mr. Freeman: Can I ask you something? You saw the Keedoozle stores a lot. Can you guess where Clarence Saunders got the money to develop Keedoozle?

Mr. Porteous: Well, there was various stories on that. There was somebody here who backed him and lost money. Somebody who was pretty prominent If I just had the files of stories I wrote here at that time, I could answer that, but I have just boxes and boxes of clippings, and they are not indexed in any way. Before you came . . . if I could just find some of the stories I wrote fifty years ago.

Mr. Freeman: You say he was never really bankrupt.

Mr. Porteous: I don't think so. He was supposed to have been.

Mr. Freeman: He lived too well.

Mr. Porteous: It's always my idea that Clarence Saunders stashed away some money somehow. He never did change his mode of livelihood. He always lived well. Memphis Country Club. I would not say he was a spendthrift, a big party type, that was more Clay's style.



Clarence, about Keedoozle's time (1930s), he had got rid of his original wife and married a right young good-looking blonde. He had a blonde wife, but that was not the mother of his children, not the mother of Clay and Lee. There was a daughter, Lou.

Mr. Freeman: The second wife's name is Pat Saunders.

Mr. Porteous: Yea, did you talk to her? She could tell you a lot of things.

Mr. Freeman: She was not interested in an interview.

Mr. Porteous: She was a good-looking woman in those days. I don't know what she looks like now. I didn't even know she was still alive. I'm not sure, but I think they had a child.

Mr. Freeman: A daughter.

Mr. Porteous: A daughter, they sure did. Frankly, Mike, I never was that much interested in Clarence Saunders. I knew him and wrote some stories on him, but there were a lot of other people . . .

There were people on that picture over there (Mr. Porteous is referring to a Carroll Cloar painting in his living room. The painting depicts an imaginary meeting in 1940 of several Memphis personalities on Beale Street, among them: W. C. Handy, E. H. Crump, and Clarence Saunders. Clark Porteous, himself, is depicted in the painting as the reporter covering the event.) I knew much better and was more interested in George Lee. I used to write a lot of stuff about him. He was a Negro Republican leader, and he wrote books. I've got some books of his in that bookcase. And Handy, Handy would come down here (Memphis) for the Blues Bowl game every fall, and I interviewed him every year. I knew a lot more about Handy, Dr. Diehl (President of Southwestern). I covered City Hall some.



(Watkins) Overton was Crump's mayor then. Of all those people on there, I probably knew Clarence I wrote (Senator) K. D. McKellar's obit. I knew him pretty well, he used to live in the Hotel Gayoso. I wrote about ^{Monk} Mark Casata. I knew every one of them in the picture way better than I knew Clarence Saunders.

Mr. Freeman: Let me ask you some questions. Of course, Crump is prominent in that painting. In the 1920s Saunders was interested in politics. He wrote ads for (Governor) Austin Peay.

Mr. Porteous: That was before my time. But he did get involved in politics and got crosswise with Crump.

Mr. Freeman: Sure did.

Mr. Porteous: Crump and him were both great exponents, long before television and even radio was weak in those days, newspapers were it. They would run these scurrilous newspaper ads. Crump was still doing that in the 1930s and 1940s. He ran a newspaper ad about me one time. That had nothing to do with Clarence Saunders; it was about (Governor) Browning. Browning was against him (Crump). You are right, but when I knew him, he (Saunders) was getting involved in the Keedoozle business, in the 1930s. As far as I could tell, he was not involved in politics at all. I think Crump pretty well licked him and cured him. I don't know. In the 1920s, Clarence Saunders was a very rich man; he could afford to dabble in politics then. In the 1930s, on the surface, he wasn't supposed to be all that rich. I think he was though. That's a moot point (because); nobody really knows what he had.

Mr. Freeman: That's true. Do you think Crump and Saunders got along later in life?



Mr. Porteous: As far as I could tell, when he was doing the Keedoozle, they were getting along all right. I'm not going to say they were close friends, but they weren't fighting each other at all. And Saunders wasn't having trouble getting permits for his stores, that kind of thing. Crump could easily kill off a political enemy. I'm inclined to believe they had made their peace.

Mr. Freeman: You mean Crump never did try to make trouble for Saunders?

Mr. Porteous: No, and Saunders never did try to make trouble for Crump. That was . . . as I say, I came on the paper in 1934, and from 1930 to '34, I was at Southwestern, and I heard all the gossip and rumors. But before that, it would be hearsay. I don't know too much about it. I was just a kid down in Laurel, Mississippi. I came to Memphis in the Fall of 1930 to go to Southwestern. I do remember that Crump and Saunders had tied up, and the Austin Peay campaign was one of them. Saunders, I guess, had gotten pretty big and thought he could elect a governor. But I don't think he ever beat Crump.

Mr. Freeman: I've read these newspaper ads. According to some people, in 1922 Austin Peay won in . . .

Mr. Porteous: Maybe they stole it from him.

Mr. Freeman: Because of Saunders' help.

Mr. Porteous: He did? Was Crump opposing Austin Peay at the time?

Mr. Freeman: Crump was opposing Austin Peay at the time.

Mr. Porteous: Well, you probably know more than I do. The story goes that Crump never lost a state election, but that is not true.



He had lost some state elections, but his first real loss was in 1948, when (Senator) Estes Kefauver and (Governor) Browning both beat his candidates. And it was a fluke thing, but it has nothing to do with Clarence Saunders. Kefauver won that election with 37% of the vote. A United States Senator did not have to have a majority of the vote, there was no runoff. They thought Tom Stewart would get out of the race, and he didn't. Browning beat (then Governor) McCord, and people decided not to go for Crump's candidate, John Mitchell, for United States Senate, they backed off. McCord put in the first sales tax, which wasn't too popular with people. But Crump ran things in Memphis till the day he died.

Mr. Freeman: He's an interesting story all himself.

Mr. Porteous: When did Saunders die? I forgot.

Mr. Freeman: 1953.

Mr. Porteous: I thought he died before Crump (who passed away in 1954).

Mr. Freeman: So you really did not know the family that well, at all. Did you socialize with them?

Mr. Porteous: Oh, no. I was poor--reporters didn't make much money then. We didn't socialize with the country club crowd. Only time I went out to the country club in many, many years, they sent me out to cover a golf tournament. I didn't know how to do it. Old David Bloom (of the Commercial Appeal), he knew me from athletics at Southwestern, he said, "Clark, just look up at that leader board there, and when they put the scores there, you just call in the scores to your paper." He was right. That's what I did. He showed



me how to cover a golf tournament. I wasn't particularly doing sports then, they just needed me to fill in.

No, I didn't socialize with him. I knew Tunkie in later years. He wrote me a letter--he liked something I wrote about him. I wouldn't say we were friends or socialites, it was strictly business as a reporter.

Mr. Freeman: What did you talk to Tunkie about?

Mr. Porteous: I don't remember. I remember trying to talk to him about that shooting thing, but he wasn't to be found. He wasn't talking about that. (laughs)

Mr. Freeman: I guess not. I know a few things about that football team. I interviewed Red Cavette.

Mr. Porteous: He could tell you a lot of things.

Mr. Freeman: It's my understanding that Saunders lost a lot of money on that football team.

Mr. Porteous: Yea. Well, I don't know whether you would call lost. They needed tax shelters in those days, as they do now. He just had so much money that--what the heck, he didn't care. You can't hardly Memphis, Tennessee, in those days, even if you filled Hodges Field. every game, you still would have lost money. This was early football--before the pros got well organized. But the Chicago Bears and some other teams were pretty potent back then. But they didn't pay players anything like they do now. The dollars . . . when you compare them, aren't anything like now.

Hell, I made ten dollars a week on the Press Scimitar when I started, and I lived well on that. Ten dollars a week in 1934, I would say, is better than 100 dollars a week today, as far



as buying power. I could eat a good lunch downtown for 25 cents. I boarded over here on Tutwiler in a very nice home, a nice room for five dollars a week. I had a nice room, breakfast, and dinner at night. I'd buy my lunch downtown for two bits. I'd ride the street-car for seven cents, that's fourteen cents a day. Of course, when I was working, I used company cars or taxis. When I was on my own, I used streetcars.

I'm sure he lost money on it. I don't think he had any intention of making money on it. He was sort of a vain guy. I think he liked that, "Clarence Saunders Tigers." and frankly, I think he liked pro football. I know he never went to college, never had the opportunity to be a college football player. That was something he could have done, and he was getting his football thrills, not by playing, but by having his own team. Of course, he was too old to play then. He was a middle-aged man when I knew him. How old was he when he died?

Mr. Freeman: About 70, 72.

Mr. Porteous: That's what I thought. In 1937 or '38 he was well into his middle age. I think he had been a grocery salesman at one time--store to store, when he was a young man?

Mr. Freeman: Yes, when he was young.

Mr. Porteous: I think that's what he told me or what I had heard.

Mr. Freeman: He worked out of Memphis.

Mr. Porteous: He apparently worked for a wholesale grocer selling to retail stores. I guess's that's where he learned the grocery business--and don't fool you--he knew the grocery business--wasn't any question. Oh, I remember this. When you went to



his Keedoozle, he had rattlesnake meat . . . it was canned. I didn't even know it existed, that people ate that sort of thing. Oh, he claimed that it was quite a delicacy. He would go in for unusual things other Memphians did not have . . . not completely. He also had what they called loss leaders, things you sell real cheap to lure people into the store. I will never forget how shocked I was when I picked up that can and he said, "Oh, take it! You should try it!"

"No, Sir. No, thank you, Mr. Saunders." Trying to give me a can of rattlesnake meat, just the idea of it was so . . .

Mr. Freeman: Was he kidding?

Mr. Porteous: No, he had it for sale in the store. He wanted me to try it. I didn't even know it was a delicacy.

Mr. Freeman: I heard he was eccentric.

Mr. Porteous: He was eccentric. Apparently rattlesnake meat wasn't something he invented. It was . . . (He searches for the word.)

Mr. Freeman: Gourmet?

Mr. Porteous: It probably was something you find in a gourmet store. I don't know. He probably had it to do just like he did to me, to shock people. I don't think people in Memphis would know about rattlesnake meat, or want to try it.

Side Two

Mr. Porteous: It's too bad his widow won't talk to you. I imagine she is well off. Where does she live?

Mr. Freeman: Over on Poplar, across from Overton Park.

(Mr. Porteous then introduces his grandson, Michael.)

Mr. Porteous: There was a time when she would have talked to you, she wouldn't be all that old. She was quite a bit younger than Clarence Saunders. I imagine she is about 70.

Mr. Freeman: She's in her 80s.

Mr. Porteous: Is that right? That's probably why she won't talk to you. People are inclined to get eccentric in their old age, speaking from experience. (laughs)

Mr. Freeman: Let me ask you about Mrs. Saunders. Did you know her at all or any stories about her and how Clarence Saunders met her?

Mr. Porteous: You mean the first or the second one?

Mr. Freeman: Well the divorce and remarriage to the younger woman was a scandal.

Mr. Porteous: Well yea, it was. There was a lot of talk about it. I guess something in the papers about it. Story was he ditched his wife of many years, just like you said and married this young blonde.

Mr. Freeman: Was there some type of affair?

Mr. Porteous: Probably. I imagine he was going with her before he married her. I'm not sure. I hate to say these things because it's been so long I think he was a bit of a ladies man. I mean getting rid of his wife and marrying a younger woman may not have been the only peccadillo in his career. I hate to say something like this definitely. I get it in the back of my mind that he might have had some mistresses, girl friends before . . . or after or whatever, when he was riding high with a lot of money, he probably did.



Mr. Freeman: I understand, too, he was a gambler.

Mr. Porteous: I never heard about gambling except for Wall Street.

Mr. Freeman: That was part of it, Wall Street.

Mr. Porteous: He sure was a gambler on Wall Street. But as far as craps or card games, I never heard of it.

Mr. Freeman: You remember hearing any stories about Wall Street?

Mr. Porteous: Yea.

Mr. Freeman: I understand some people in Memphis sold him out.

Mr. Porteous: I remember what he said, "They (the Stock Exchange) changed the rules on me." They probably did. I think some people in Memphis got cold feet and backed out on him.

Mr. Freeman: He borrowed a lot of money.

Mr. Porteous: I wish I could remember the name of the guy who took a financial bath, supposedly. Does the name Kingsly ring a bell? Somebody lost money and Clarence Saunders didn't (on Keedoozle). He had a financial scapegoat, supposedly.

Mr. Freeman: Was this in Keedoozle?

Mr. Porteous: Yea.

Mr. Freeman: My impression was that Saunders lost a lot of money, he gambled.

Mr. Porteous: I think he lost other people's money.

Mr. Freeman: On Piggly Wiggly stock?

Mr. Porteous: That, and in keedoozle, too. I don't know about Clarence Saunders' Sole Owner of My Name (stores), but I imagine so because he didn't keep them either.

I tell you that was his big idea--I think some of them go too far today--self-service. You go to a Zayre or Skaggs



and you want to ask the price of something, you have to practically run someone down. It's all self-service. Even with a lot of shoplifting, I guess they figure it's better than paying a lot of clerks. When I was growing up, when you went to a store, somebody waited on you. You never helped yourself to a darn thing. There were lots of clerks in stores, grocery stores. You are too young to remember that. There was no help yourself. Oh, you might know the grocer who said, "go help yourself to some crackers"--a small store. But anywhere else a clerk waited on you. Hardware stores, clothing stores, drug stores. All these stores are self-service now. Piggly Wiggly started self-service. Saunders, I guess changed the method of retailing all over the country, probably all over the world. That's the big thing he did.

Mr. Freeman: He's credited with that invention, the self-service design.

Mr. Porteous: He did, and Keedoozle was going to be even more self-service. I think you are going to find they did finally get it working, and it was fairly successful in Sweden. I think when he died he still had some of it, some patents on Keedoozle.

Mr. Freeman: I'm not jure just what patents he had on Keedoozle.

Mr. Porteous: Lee died not too long ago. I don't know what happened to Clay. I think he died an alcoholic at City Hospital. But his daughter may still be alive.

Mr. Freeman: The very youngest daughter is still alive.

Mr. Porteous: She would be the daughter of the second wife. She wouldn't know a lot. I bet the other daughter of his first wife would know a lot.



Mr. Freeman: She's dead.

Mr. Porteous: There's somebody who lost a lot of money. I keep thinking his name is Kingsly. You never ran across anybody who had something to do with him financially?

Mr. Freeman: The people I talked to were young, were clerks. They worked for him as clerks.

Mr. Porteous: So they don't know the real story.

Mr. Freeman: They weren't on the inside, they weren't his equals.

Mr. Porteous: I would talk to George Treadwell if I were you.

George is a real nice guy, a low pressure type. He's with Treadwell and Harry and retired from that business. He still plays golf. He has invited me to play with him, I never have. He's probably in the phone book, and he probably will talk to you. He's the sort of kingpin out there, and he is in his 80s. I bet he played golf with Clarence Saunders, and he just may know the inside financial things, and he's the kind of guy who will probably talk to you. I got a feeling George would know some things. Of course, you never know, he might be one of the guys who hated him. Some people did, you know.

Mr. Freeman: They hated Clarence Saunders?

Mr. Porteous: Well, you figure for financial reasons or other. He was the kind of guy you either liked or hated. People weren't very indifferent about him--they either liked him or disliked him intensely. I don't know how George felt about him. George could well have liked him.

Mr. Freeman: You know, when Piggly Wiggly took off, Clarence Saunders was extremely popular judging from his newspaper clippings.



Mr. Porteous: Well, he was selling so cheap and selling stuff under what other people were selling. That was one reason. Also, though people resented . . . they thought he was going to cost a lot of them their jobs, grocery clerks. There was that side of it, too. And I suspect he did in the long run, although those weren't much (in the way of) jobs.

Mr. Freeman: I suppose people didn't like him if they ventured money and lost.

Mr. Porteous: When the Depression came along, I think that was after Clarence's peak . . . I don't think that's what caused him to go broke. The Depression started in 1929. The Pink Palace was sitting out there incomplete, as it sat for a long, long time. I remember coming to Memphis, it must have been 1929, (and) the Sterick Building was standing long and tall and incomplete. Governor Sterling of Texas and his son-in-law, I think his name was Warrick . . . that's how they got the name Sterick--Sterling and added Warrick to the end. The Sterick Building (downtown) stood vacant because they ran out of money. On one end (of Memphis) there was the Sterick Building, and on the other end was the Pink Palace.

Oh, I remember Saunders was going to build a big store over by Sears in Crosstown. There was a basement, a big hole in the ground. It may have been on the pavement, the Sears parking lot For many years, there was this huge pavement, concrete walls built around it. But Saunders was gonna build a big store and, for some reason, stopped. That big hole stayed there for years.



Mr. Freeman: He probably ran out of money.

Mr. Porteous: Ran out of money, ran out of backing, something. This was in the early '30s.

Mr. Freeman: Was this a Sole Owner store?

Mr. Porteous: There was some banker, Bank of Commerce. Some banker ran what's now the National Bank of Commerce was involved in this crosstown store . . . the store they didn't build, just the basement. These are some of the stories you heard, but weren't written about much. Saunders' basement stood there for years and years.

Mr. Freeman: That's what everybody knew it as, Saunders' basement?

Mr. Porteous: I don't know what kind of store was to be there, but it was before Keedoozle.

Mr. Freeman: Did you see that house Bill Terry bought, the Lichterman Nature Center?

Mr. Porteous: Yea. If I am not mistaken, the log cabin of ^{the} Chi Omegas came from here.

Mr. Freeman: How did he (Saunders) lose that home, was it another bankruptcy?

Mr. Porteous: Supposedly. I think Bill Terry just bought it. I don't know whether it was a forced sale or not.

Bill Terry started out playing ball here at what they called the pony leagues. Some kind of Standard Oil thing . . . a real good baseball team. He played semipro, went up to the big leagues, hit 400, managed the (New York) Giants. He came back here, but he didn't stay too long here, went to Florida and got a Buick dealership in Daytona or somewhere. I remember Bill Terry.



Mr. Freeman: You knew him?

Mr. Porteous: He was still kind of a public relations man for Standard Oil after his baseball career. He had been supposed to be tough on sportswriters. Joseph Williams, who was also from Memphis, was editor of the (New York) World-Telegram, now defunct . . . Terry wouldn't give him his unlisted phone, so Joe Williams started harassing him, picking at him. I found Terry very agreeable, maybe because he was a public relations man.

And Saunders, too. Saunders liked publicity. He didn't dodge me at all.

Mr. Freeman: Oh yea, he liked to talk to you?

Mr. Porteous Yes. He wasn't like some of those people who tried to avoid the press. He was very happy to see a reporter. He loved it. I say that's the reason he had the football team--the publicity.

I've been in the business more than fifty years. I've interviewed, I guess, 20,000 people and written 100,000 stories. So it's hard to remember particularly if he wasn't outstanding. I can't remember all that stuff, don't try to remember.

Mr. Freeman: Saunders was a long time ago, his heyday was years ago.

Mr. Porteous: I remember all those guys there (on the painting). I sat in Arthur Halle's office many times about the Cotton Carnival, the parades. I sat in George Lee's office on Beale Street. I talked to Crump many times though it was mostly over the phone. I saw Handy every year. Dr. Diehl was president of Southwestern when I was there. I probably knew Clarence Saunders less well than any of the others up there. Yet, he was very interesting, and I



probably would, if I had the chance to know him, have liked him very much. But, in those days, you did what the city editor told you to do. He'd assign you to a story on Clarence Saunders, and that was it. You just didn't do stories on him all the time.

Mr. Freeman: He was in the newspapers quite a bit?

Mr. Porteous: But his heyday was in the 20's, before I came along. I caught him on the rebound. He was wanting to make a comeback. Most of the early stuff was hearsay. When you interviewed him you didn't ask him a whole lot of stuff about Piggly Wiggly when he was interested in Keedoozle.

Mr. Freeman: He probably didn't want to talk about Piggly Wiggly in the 1930s.

Mr. Porteous: No, I don't think so. He didn't mind talking about Wall Street. I never got the feeling he didn't want to talk about it.

Mr. Freeman: Did he have any regrets?

Mr. Porteous: Didn't seem to bother him at all. I wondered about that. A man who had so many millions He was looking to the future and not to the past. He thought he had something great in Keedoozle, he wasn't even worried about what he had lost in the past. I detected no regrets. But I have a sneaky feeling he wasn't all that poor.

Mr. Freeman: Do you remember seeing him those last years?

Mr. Porteous: Yea, it seems like I did, but I can't remember what it was about. I remember clearly that earlier day at Keedoozle



and then later out at Union Extended. I may have written his obit, but I don't remember. I wrote a lot of obituaries of famous poeple. I don't have any details I can recall of his later years.

Mr. Freeman: My understanding he was still working on an electronics store.

Mr. Porteous: Yea, he was.

Mr. Freeman: My understanding he was very sick at the time.

Mr. Porteous: Yea, he was, but I don't recall what was wrong with him.







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